



**City of  
Northampton**

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## EQUITY IN HOUSING

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**Jackie Ballance** <jackieballance@comcast.net>

Thu, Feb 18, 2021 at 10:28 PM

To: "lkrutzler@northamptonma.gov" <lkrutzler@northamptonma.gov>

Hi, Laura!

Please FWD this message to members of the Ordinance Review Committee including solicitor Seewald.

To esteemed members of the Ordinance Review Committee:

After the last meeting of your Committee, I wrote with enthusiasm about the possibility of using the city's "FIT" criteria to promote more affordable and equitable housing in Northampton. Since then I've had second thoughts about the difficulties of using that tool.

Last week in a discussion of the new 2-Family-by-Right ordinance, Atty. Alan Verson, a member of the Planning Board, made a simple and elegant suggestion to simply cap the size of new single-family homes as a way to bring down prices. Examination of the city's new Climate Resilience and Regeneration Plan strongly supports Atty. Verson's suggestion.

Some important points the Resilience & Regeneration Plan makes:

- page 22: The energy we use in single-family homes makes up... 18% of our community emissions.
- page 25: Within the city's footprint, increasing building energy efficiency is the most cost-effective way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions... This requires a variety of actions, including... right-sizing new construction to avoid over-building.
- page 49: Encourage housing diversity, smaller residential units that are efficient with resources.
- (page 50 and throughout the document.) Equity cuts across all aspects of this plan.

City Council could cap new single family houses around eleven hundred sq ft, a modest but comfortable size for a family of four based on my own growing-up experience. Anyone who wants or needs something larger can ask for an exception and expect a fair hearing.

Smaller houses cost less simply because they use fewer resources. Lower cost means improved access to home ownership for marginalized groups of people. For example, there's a new "green" Habitat for Humanity 1 BR solar house in Florence, valued by Zillow at \$120,000, which demonstrates that a person of modest means can have chance at home ownership. "Tiny houses" are actually in vogue. I even found a Net-Zero pre-fab house kit online for \$100K. A cap on the size of new single-family homes would be a big step towards lowering the cost of home ownership in our city, and thus towards meeting our climate and equity goals.

I think recommending this ordinance idea to the City Council might be more effective than the "FIT" idea I previously shared. At least one Planning Board member and 2 or 3 Councilors might already be on board, so there's even some chance for success.

Looking forward to Monday evening.  
Jackie Ballance  
35 Warner St.

